



# TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR HOME SAFER

**Steps/Stairs: Is riser height going into house and within home correct or too low, too high or uneven?**

**Why it matters:** Stairs with incorrect height or unevenness increase the likelihood of a fall. Proper riser height is determined by local building safety codes and should not exceed 8 1/4".

**Railings: Are they present inside and outside the home and on both sides of stairs/steps?**

**Why it matters:** Continuous handrails on both sides of the stairs better assure safety in unexpected situations.

**Lighting: Is there adequate lighting in all areas, including hallways and stairs, inside and outside the home?**

**Why it matters:** Poor lighting, especially at night, increases the risk of a fall. Add nightlights to hallways and bathrooms and ensure that light switches are accessible and working properly.

**Floor surfaces: Are there tripping hazards? Slanted or uneven floors? Thresholds between rooms or at points of egress?**

**Why it matters:** Uneven or cluttered floors may result in falls. Make sure electric cords are away from walking pathways and elevate papers and small decorative objects from the floor. Contact a licensed contractor if thresholds need to be reduced or floor unevenness corrected.

**Area rugs: Are they lumpy or slippery? Are bath mats non-skid?**

**Why it matters:** Small area rugs often cause falls. It is advised that throw rugs be removed. If not possible, ensure they are taped securely to the floor and that bath rugs have non-skid backing.

### **Furniture: Is furniture design unsafe? Is home cluttered?**

**Why it matters:** Chairs that are difficult to rise from may increase the risk of a fall. Avoid glass-topped and pedestal tables and choose furniture with rounded edges. To better ensure safety, ample room is needed to move within your living space if a walker or wheelchair is introduced.

### **Doorway widths: Can a wheel chair or walker pass through easily?**

**Why it matters:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recommends a minimum doorway width of 36 inches to reduce the risk of falling and allow emergency responders egress in an emergency.

### **Distance bed to toilet: Can you walk to the toilet with ease?**

**Why it matters:** Many falls occur at night when walking to a bathroom. If possible, situate the bed in a spot that allows for straight and uncluttered passage. If not possible, a bedside commode may be helpful.

### **Bathrooms: Is there room for maneuvering and room for tub bench/grab bars?**

**Why it matters:** Falls often occur in the bathroom, especially if it is small and does not have grab bars. Have a contractor install grab bars next to the toilet, inside and next to the shower. Shower benches decrease fall risk in a slippery tub and provide relief from pain associated with movement.

### **Kitchen: Can everyday items be accessed with ease?**

**Why it matters:** Reaching above the head can increase the risk of a fall. Place frequently used items on lower shelves and microwaves and toasters at counter height. Consider adding a pull out pantry and storage drawers which are more accessible. Slip resistant flooring provides safety in the event of a spill. A grabbing tool may eliminate the need for a step stool.

**Other: Consider purchasing a Medical Alert Systems that can be worn on the wrist or around the neck. Your local Council on Aging may be contacted for further information.**

This assessment was developed by Kris Vrooman, PT (ret.) and the Edgartown Council on Aging and is not a validated self-assessment tool. The content is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice. Please contact your physician or other qualified professional with questions regarding your safety and mobility issues. Contact a licensed contractor for modification advice and requests.